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ABSTRACT

There have been enduring conflicts in correctional institutions between personnel charged with rehabilitative duties and those who oversee authority. It is only within the past few years that realistic communication between these groups has been tolerated. The same period of time has been characterized by the infusion of training and staff development programs. There are indications that now is the time to reassess these ventures. Four predictable problem areas should be confronted in planning successful prison inservice programs. First, staff development activities aimed at confronting typical malaise within prisons are likely to be more successful when based away from the work environment. Second, alternatives to the standardization and centralization of programs should be considered which offer greater flexibility in meeting personnel needs. Third, a multi-level hierarchical involvement in the planning of inservice programs in which personnel expectations are considered along with institutional needs and resources is likely to produce the best program outcomes. Finally, to overcome the traditional conflicts among prison personnel, staff training programs should be made more comprehensive and inclusive. (EM)

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Rethinking Correctional Staff Development

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Rethinking Correctional Staff Development

Berkeley's legendary police chief, August Vollmer, once described American prisons as our "trademarks of failure," posing a contrast with the common conception of educational enterprises as gateways to success. The irony of education in prison, however, really began after World War II, with meteoric increases of educational psychological, and related social services "behind the walls." The presence of such professional activity set the stage for enduring conflicts between "treatment" and "custody" personnel. At all levels---local, state, and federal---formidable, if vacuous, dichotomies have persisted between those charged with rehabilitative duties and those who oversee security. In many institutions, it is only within the past few years that realistic communication has been tolerated between these two groups, as well as between inmates and these groups. The same period of time has been characterized by the infusion of massive training and staff development activities, usually underwritten by substantial federal and state funding.

There are strong indications that now is the time to reassess these ventures. The span of these programs includes training in "nuts and bolts" security measures as well as more broadly construed efforts at human relations improvements. Each, however, shares a reactive, rather than planned on anticipatory origination. A litigation here, a "disturbance" there, tension everywhere, has formed an incremental vacuum not conducive to large-scale rational planning.

The era of large-scale funding, begun with the Safe Streets Act of 1968 and the subsequent origination of the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA), seems to have reached a plateau. Further, the perennial "political football" issues of crime, punishment, and rehabilitation are most often presented to the public in such frenzied tones that it becomes increasingly

important to become prepared to identify and plan for the next stage of staff development changes in corrections. The following concerns are presented as predictable problem areas to be confronted in a path lying between wholesale indictments of ineffectiveness of prison programs[1] and myopic contentions of breakthrough successes.

I. The requisite of off-site activity. Working in prison is a uniquely fatiguing cycle of experiences for residents and staff alike. It is perhaps best characterized by crisis interrupted by prolonged periods of monotony. This is principally because prison itself is a "unisexual, age-graded, total institution of social control" in which "controllers depend...on the passive acquiescence of the controlled."[2] Crisis is not only typified by occassional disruption or strike by one group or another, but likewise by a debilitating "institutional press," a vehicle of control exemplified by complex blends of misinformation, fear, conflicting directives and regulations, and, in most institutions, phenomenal turnover among both staff and inmates. Because of these conditions, staff development activities aimed at confronting the ensuing malaise are likely to be useful only when based away from the work environment. This is much related to the idea of "psycho-social moritoria" expressed by Margaret Mead several decades ago. Opportunities to escape from stolid "turf" arrangments and petty pressures are more likely to foster settings for heightened reflection and freer exchange or perceptions. In some instances, an academy environment facilitates this process; often a greater sense of "retreat" is demanded. However, only the most cursory gains seem to have been made by on-site programs.

II. Alternatives to standardization and centralization. Ardent requests and recommendations for both staff and materials development are not new to the correctional scene. The noted Wickersham Commission of 1931 and the 1967

Report of the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice are among landmark reports stressing personnel and curriculum needs in prison programs. Initial programmatic responses have netted centralization of educational services to the incarcerated, which has ushered in new sets of problems. Significantly, recently acquired computer capabilities and innovations in instructional and curricular design, such as modularization of adult basic and vocational education programs,[3] offer greater flexibility and range in terms of staffing allocation and course content. However, accessible feedback systems, such as those enabling institution-based teachers to engage in periodic information exchange, seem not to be forthcoming. Concommitant problems involve upgrading record-keeping and record transfer procedures for inmates. Such measures imply some increase in procedural standardization. However, initiative and authority to alter curriculum components, instructional strategies and materials, and recording and record transfer practices could be decentralized and enhanced by a consortium-like exchange and sharing atmosphere. Personnel have always traded ideas---good and bad; however, implementation of systems for circulating, collating, and modifying ideas will likely both improve materials and bolster the idea that employee initiative is respected and rewardable.

Staff development programs share many of the characteristics of the treatment functions they are designed to enhance. When institution-centered, each suffers from the prevailing isolated and sensorily deprived environment. Unlike custodial services, which are dispersed throughout a facility, most rehabilitative programs---social, medical, educational, and psychological--tend to be concentrated in one area, like a mid-town island encircled by urban decay. In most prisons, "up front" and the "blocks" are constellations apart. Too often, in-service development is overtly isolated from the immediate

environment it addresses. Clearly, many staff development efforts require separation from institutional press; hence, the previous suggestion of an academy setting. When training programs are facility-bound, however, they should be fused with an experiencing of the settings and clients which one strategically encounters on the job.

III. Multi-level involvement. A related problem is aloofness of the "hierarchy" and/or "central office staff" from "rank-and-file". Staff development is frequently and justifiably regarded with cynicism by those who infer that lack of presence indicates lack of concern by correctional policy-makers in multi-facility organizations. This is not a mere case of troops needing to see leaders; it is the culmination of a hallmark professional attitude that real change, like learning, is a shared process in which lines must not only be open, but need to be constantly visible and viable. Needs cogent to such concerns are not usually met by delegation of responsibility to "representatives". This has occurred with such frequency in correctional staff development functions that continuation of the practice can only result in more cynical regard for the effectiveness of overall efforts. Institution-based teachers have been over-exposed to excuses that more pressing affairs have detained those at the top, who in actuality, most need to feel the pulse of what is going on "at the front." Conversely, institutional teachers need to know that their perceptions can be transmitted directly and completely to those who can place them in adequate policy perspective.

Perhaps a review of fundamental needs assessment sequences is in order. Training programs employing this model have usually (1) listed potential objectives, (2) received preferences on the list from learners, (3) assessed the extent to which the learners have already achieved the objectives, (4) assessed

the extent to which resources and personnel may allign to instruct toward each objectives, and (5) synthesized primary objectives from composites of learner interest, need, and resource availability. However, efforts to involve all concerned parties are usually frustrated by the short-circuiting of this needs assessment process. Too often learner priorities are solicited after program developers pass judgment on resources, agency need, and learner expectation. Thus, input by those served through training is frequently restricted to choosing from only what developers already regard as possible. The planning of in-service programs becomes alienated from the chance to really discern the points of view of learners. It may be reasonable to seek a balance between expectations and resources, but one should not be surprised to find learners a bit resentful about being consulted only after the real decisions have been made. There are no intrinsic evils in generating interest in training because grants are available to support it, or beacuse experts advise it as a necessary move. Yet, the best outcomes are likely to be stimulated when learners know that their own conceptions of professional needs are valued as equally as those of an agency, or potential funding source.

IV. Overcoming traditional conflicts. Not only have traditional antipathies between treatment and custody sectors festered too long, but conflicts among those directly responsible for training and educational services to inmates--vocational and academic teachers as well as prison industry supervisors--have frequently debilitated quality of service and staff morale. Some have suggested that staff development activities may begin to offset these frustrations by "mixing" in-service participants--for example, placing correctional educators in programs with public school teachers,[4] or correctional officers with counseling or vocational training staff. It might be sufficient to merge activities designated for "professional" staff with all others, particulary

at the entry level. Most states have formally acceded to national standards and goals[5] for in-service training for all employees in corrections. Unfortunately, these usually become a priority for only correctional officer development. Relatedly, the federal model of correctional officer-counselor is addressed to merging the role rather than the training. Since existing role separation is likely to continue at most correctional levels, however, it may be feasible only to think in terms of making training programs more comprehensive and inclusive. This seems more practical as one notes that while correctional educators constitute the second largest block of prison employees (next to security officers), they number less than five thousand nationwide (matched with an institutionalized population of two million)[6]. It would seem that moves in any other direction may only further irritate existing devisive factors in prison work. Given skyrocketing increases in rates and durations of incarceration, inattention to these factors may further obviate chances for bringing more rehabilitative climates into being.

FOOTNOTES

1. Douglas Lipton, Robert Martinson, and Judith Wilks, The Effectiveness of Correctional Treatment, New York: Praeger, 1975.

2. Hans J. Mattick, "The Prosaic Sources of Prison Violence," Society, November/December, 1973, pp. 13-22.

3. Joseph A. Mangano and Joseph A. Bosco, "Redesigning Academic Curriculum," Journal of Correctional Education, Vol 28, #1, 1976, pp. 14-16.

4. David C. Jelinek, "Organizational Arrangements for Training," in Targets for In-Service Training, Washington, DC: Joint Commission on Correctional Manpower and Training, October, 1967, p. 45.

5. Report of the Task Force on Corrections, Washington, DC: National Advisory Commission on Criminal Justice Standards and Goals, 1973. See particularly Standard 14.11.

6. Perspectives on Correctional Manpower and Training, Washington, DC: Joint Commission on Correctional Manpower and Training, 1970, p. 22.